

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-02 INR-07 L-03

NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06 AID-05

PC-01 COME-00 SIL-01 LAB-04 EB-07 IO-11 OMB-01 DHA-02

AGR-05 /094 W

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R 051508Z FEB 76

FM AMEMBASSY MANAGUA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 9061

INFO AMEMBASSY PANAMA

AMEMBASSY SAN JOSE

AMEMBASSY SAN SALVADOR

AMEMBASSY TEGUCIGALPA

AMEMBASSY GUATEMALA VIA POUCH

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 MANAGUA 0577

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, NU

SUBJECT: SUBVERSION AND OPPRESSION AMONG TOBACCO WORKERS

SUMMARY: NATIONAL GUARD APPEARS TO HAVE ENGAGED IN QUESTIONABLE INTERROGATION TACTICS IN CONNECTION WITH INVESTIGATION OF FSLN ACTIVITIES IN NUEVA SEGOVIA. SOCIAL CHRISTIAN CAMPESINO UNIONS, WHICH CURRENTLY ARE HAVING PROBLEM WITH PRESIDENT SOMOZA'S TOBACCO INTERESTS, SEEM TO HAVE BEEN SINGLED OUT FOR ATTENTION BY GUARD AS PART OF INVESTIGATION. SEVERAL AMCITIZEN PRIESTS ARE ALSO INVOLVED IN TROUBLED REGION. END SUMMARY

1. THE LAST TWO MONTHS HAVE SEEN UNVEILING OF AN UNSUSPECTED AMOUNT OF PROBLEMS IN NICARAGUA'S TOBACCO COUNTRY INVOLVING AMERICAN PRIESTS, CAMPESINOS, LABOR LEADERS AND THE FRENTE SANDINISTA (FSLN). THE FULL AND TRUE STORY OF THE TROUBLES HAS BEEN DIFFICULT TO PIECE TOGETHER BECAUSE OF CENSORSHIP. HOWEVER, THE INFORMATION THAT WE HAVE BEEN ABLE TO OBTAIN INDICATES BOTH THE PRESENCE OF A STATE OF TENSION BETWEEN CAMPESINOS AND NATIONAL
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GUARD AND THE USE OF TORTURE TECHNIQUES IN COUNTER-SUBVERSIVE

INVESTIGATIONS.

2. THE EXISTENCE OF A PROBLEM IN THE TOBACCO GROWING AREA AROUND JALAPA, QUILALI, AND EL JICARO IN THE DEPARTMENT OF NUEVA SEGOVIA WAS FIRST BROUGHT TO NATIONAL ATTENTION ON DEC. 12 WHEN THE NATIONAL GUARD AT JALAPA JAILED ADOLFO BONILLA, SECRETARY GENERAL OF THE SOCIAL CHRISTIAN-AFFILIATED CONFEDERATION OF NICARAGUAN WORKERS (CTN) AND TWO MEMBERS OF HIS MANAGUA STAFF WHO WERE ATTENDING A MEETING OF THE CTN-SPONSORED CAMPESINO WORKERS' UNION (UTC). SIX LOCAL UTC ACTIVISTS WERE ALSO ARRESTED. ACCORDING TO WHAT BONILLA TOLD EMBOFFS THREE WEEKS LATER, THE JALAPA MEETING HAD BEEN CALLED TO PROTEST THE FENCING OFF OF LAND OCCUPIED BY 120 FAMILIES BY NICARAGUAN CIGAR CO. PRESIDENT AND LIBERAL DEPUTY RENE MOLINA. PRESIDENT SOMOZA OWNS A SIGNIFICANT SHARE OF THE COMPANY AND THE CTN CHARGES THAT HE ALSO HAS A CLAIM ON THE LAND IN QUESTION. THE NINE WERE BROUGHT TO THE DEPARTMENTAL CAPITAL OF OCOTAL WHERE THEY WERE INTERROGATED, ACCORDING TO BONILLA, RATHER PERFUNCTORILY, ABOUT FSLN ACTIVITIES IN THE REGION AND WERE THREATENED AND MALTREATED FOR "AGITATING". AGAIN ACCORDING TO BONILLA, SOME OF THE LOCALS WERE SUBJECTED TO SEVERE BEATINGS, TWO WERE TORTURED WITH AN ELECTRICAL DEVICE STRAPPED AROUND THEIR ANKLES, AND ONE HAD HIS LEG BROKEN DURING THE ORDEAL. ALL WERE RELEASED WITHOUT CHARGES FOUR DAYS AFTER THEIR ARRESTS.

3. A FEW DAYS LATER, FATHER JOHN C. NOLAN, ONE OF THE SEGUN AMCITIZEN FRANCISCAN PRIESTS (THERE ARE ALSO THREE MARYKNOLLERS) IN THE AREA CAME TO THE EMBASSY TO REGISTER HIS CONCERN ABOUT NATIONAL GUARD HARASSMENT OF MEMBERS OF HIS FLOCK, WHO WERE BEING DETAINED, INTERROGATED AND THEN RELEASED. THE APPARENT REASON FOR THE DETENTIONS BECAME CLEARER WHEN THE MILITARY COURT OF INVESTIGATION, IN SESSION SINCE THE FSLN 1974 LOS ROBLES ATTACK, INITIATED A HEARING IN OCOTAL. TWO OF THE FIRST WITNESSES CALLED REVEALED THAT THEY HAD BELONGED TO AN FSLN CELL IN JICARO WHICH WAS FORMED BY LEONEL ESPINOZA, WHO PARTICIPATED IN THE LOS ROBLES AFFAIR. THE TWO ALSO DISCLOSED THAT THEY WERE ACTIVE COMMUNICANTS IN A PARISH RUN BY TWO AMERICAN PRIESTS, FATHERS EVEREST BERTRAND AND WILLIAM LULOFF, AND THAT ESPINOZA AND ANOTHER SANDINISTA HAD FOUND SHELTER AT THE PARISH WHEN PURSUED BY THE NATIONAL GUARD LAST SEPTEMBER. THE AMERICAN PRIESTS TESTIFIED ON SUBSEQUENT DAYS THAT THEY HAD GIVEN LODGING TO PERSONS NOW IDENTIFIED AS SNADINISTAS, CONFIDENTIAL

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BUT THAT THEY HAD NOT KNOWN WHO THEY WERE AT THE BEGINNING. THE PRIESTS ADMITTED THAT THEIR SUSPICIONS WERE AROUSED THROUGH POLITICAL DISCUSSIONS WITH THEM ON THE SECOND NIGHT OF THEIR STAY AND MAINTAINED THAT THEY ASKED THEM TO LEAVE.

4. ALTHOUGH ALL OF THE DECEMBER WITNESSES EXCEPT THOSE DIRECTLY IMPLICATED WITH THE FSLN WERE RELEASED, A NEW ROUNDUP WAS CONDUCTED IN EARLY JANUARY INCLUDING MEMBERS OF SOCIAL CHRISTIAN

CAMPESINO AND TOBACCO PROCESSING UNIONS, MANY OF WHOM WERE ALSO ACTIVE IN THE PARISHES OF AMERICAN PRIESTS. EMBASSY CONTACTS AT THE CTN INFORMED US JANUARY 16 THAT 16-18 OF THEIR MEMBERS WERE BEING HELD INCOMMUNICADO IN OCOTAL, BUT PUZZLED ABOUT THE SPECIFIC CHARGES. TAKING ADVANTAGE OF VISIT FOR OTHER PURPOSES THE SAME DAY WITH GEN. SAMUEL GENIE OF NATIONAL GUARD OFFICE OF NATIONAL SECURITY, EMBOFF RAISED QUESTIN OF OCOTAL PRISONERS. GENIE DENIED ANY SPECIFIC KNOWLEDGE OF EXISTENCE OF PRISONERS. HE ALSO CLAIMED THAT PROBLEM IN AREA WAS BEING CAUSED BY SOCIAL CHRISTIAN UNIONS WHICH WERE NOT LABOR UNIONS AT ALL, BUT POLITICAL AGITATORS. A CTN DELEGATION VISITED OCOTAL THE NEXT DAY, VERIFIED THE DETENTIONS AND TOOK THE UNUSUAL STEP OF ISSUING A PRESS RELEASE (BROADCAST BY ONE RADIO STATION IN SANITIZED FORM), NAMING NAMES AND CHARGING THE NATIONAL GUARD WITH SUPPRESSING THE LEGITIMATE DEMANDS OF TOBACCO WORKERS ON SOMOZA'S LANDS BY TORTURE AND INTIMIDATION.

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ACTION ARA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-02 INR-07 L-03

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FM AMEMBASSY MANAGUA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 9062

INFO AMEMBASSY PANAMA

AMEMBASSY SAN JOSE

AMEMBASSY TEGUCIGALPA

AMEMBASSY GUATEMALA POUCH

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5. AMCITIZEN PRIESTS FERNAND GOSSELIN (MARYKNOLL) AND BERNARD WAGNER (FRANCISCAN) VISITED EMBASSY ON JANUARY 26 TO EXPRESS THEIR ANXIETY ABOUT THE ARRESTS AND ABOUT THREATS FROM LOCAL GUARDIA THAT FATHERS BERTRAND AND LULOFF WOULD BE EXPELLED. IN TWO-HOUR INTERVIEW WITH EMBOFFS THEY MADE DETAILED CHARGES OF

TORTURE, BASED UPON PERSONAL OBSERVATION AND INTERVIEWS WITH PRISONERS AND THEIR FAMILIES. THEY DESCRIBED ELECTRICAL DEVICE AS A HAND-OPERATED GENERATOR SIMILAR IN APPEARANCE TO A FIELD TELEPHONE FROM WHICH RUNCORDS ATTACHED TO THE LOWER LEGS. THEY ALSO ALLEGED THAT SEVERAL OF THE DETAINEES HAD BEEN BEATEN AROUND THE SHOULDERS, CHEST AND STOMACH WITH A LONG STICK AND THAT AT LEAST ONE HAD SUFFERED A SERIOUS INTERNAL INJURY AS A RESULT. THE PRIESTS WERE NOT CERTAIN WHICH OFFICERS WERE DIRECTLY IN CHARGE OF THESE DETAILS, BUT SAID THAT LT. COL. PEDRO PAVON, HEAD OF THE POLICE FORCE, WAS IN OVERALL CHARGE OF THE INTERROGATIONS AND SUSPECTED THAT COL. SEBASTIAN LOPEZ, GN DEPARTMENTAL COMMANDER, WAS FULLY INFORMED OF THE INCIDENTS. THE TWO SOUGHT TO DISPELL ANY SUSPICION THAT THE AMERICAN PRIESTS WERE INVOLVED IN SUBVERSIVE ACTIVITIES IN THE AREA AND CLAIMED THAT THEIR RELATIONS WITH THE NATIONAL GUARD HAD HISTORICALLY BEEN CORDIAL. THEY ADMITTED, HOWEVER, THAT

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FATHER BETRAND WAS SOMETHING OF A HARDHEAD AND HIS ATTITUDE HAD CREATED FRICTIONS WHICH MAY HAVE RAISED SUSPICIONS AMONG THE LOCAL MILITARY. ALTHOUGH DESCRIBING RELATIONSHIP WITH THE UTC AS TANGENTIAL, THEY ACKNOWLEDGED THEIR SYMPATHY FOR THE UNION SIDE IN ITS CURRENT PROBLEMS.

6. PEDRO JOAQUIN CHAMORRO, PRESIDENT OF UDEL AND PUBLISHER OF OPPOSITION LA PRENSA, CALLED POLOFF FEB. 2 FOR SPECIFIC PURPOSE OF INFORMING HIM THAT HE HAD HARD EVIDENCE THAT ONE OF PRISONERS, A BROTHER-IN-LAW OF UDEL COMMUNICATIONS SECRETARY EDMUNDO JARQUIN, WAS BEING TORTURED WITH ELECTRIC SHOCKS. CHAMORRO, WHO HAS GAINED A CERTAIN EXPERTISE ABOUT NICARAGUAN PRISONS OVER THE PAST TWO DECADES, SAID THE DEVICE BEING USED WAS CALLED A "CHIMICHU" OR "QUIMICHU", AN ONAMATAPOEIC DESCRIPTION OF THE SCREAM IT PRODUCED FROM THE VICTIM. ACCORDING TO CHAMORRO, THE DEVICE HAD NOT BEEN USED IN CONNECTION WITH POLITICAL INTERROGATIONS FOR SEVERAL YEARS, ALTHOUGH IT IS STILL WIDELY USED IN ORDINARY CRIMINAL INVESTIGATIONS. CHAMORRO CLAIMED THAT THE INVESTIGATION OF THE FSLN IN THE AREA WAS A RED HERRING DESIGNED TO DESTROY THE CAMPESINO UNIONS WHICH WERE PERCEIVED TO BE THREATENING SOMOZA'S HOLDINGS.

7. AT A NICARAGUAN AIR FORCE DAY CEREMONY ON FEB 1, DEFATT MENTIONED RUMORS OF TORTURE AT OCOTAL TO PRESIDENT SOMOZA, DURING COURSE OF GENERAL DISCUSSION OF U.S. CONCERN WITH HUMAN RIGHTS. SOMOZA SEEMED TO REGISTER BOTH SURPRISE AND DISMAY AT THE NEWS.

8. COMMENT: WE DEDUCE FROM THE ADMITTEDLY SCATTERED EVIDENT AND SOMEWHAT TENDENTIOUS TESTIMONY THAT CAMPESIONOS IN THE REGION HAVE BECOME RESTIVE WITH LABOR AND LAND-TENURE CONDITIONS RESULTING IN THEIR INCREASING MILITANCY OVER THE PAST YEAR. THE FSLN HAS PROBABLY BEEN FISHING IN TROUBLED WATERS AND MAY HAVE HAD SOME SUCCESS IN

INFILTRATING THE UNIONS, PERHAPS BY WAY OF PARTICIPATING IN THE AMERICAN PRIESTS' PARISH ACTIVITIES. NATIONAL GUARD ACTIONS AND COMMENTS SUGGEST THAT THE GON IS CONCERNED ABOUT THE TROUBLEMAKING POTENTIAL OF SOCIAL CHRISTIAN CAMPESINO UNIONS AS WELL AS ABOUT FSLN ACTIVITIES IN THE AREA. THERE IS NOT ENOUGH EVIDENCE TO SUPPORT A CONCLUSION THAT THE AMERICAN PRIESTS ARE ENGAGED IN SUBVERSIVE ACTIVITIES, EXCEPT INADVERTENTLY AND COINCIDENTALLY.

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9. THIS IS THE FIRST INDICATION SINCE THE LOS ROBLES INCIDENT THAT TORTURE TECHNIQUES HAVE BEEN USED ASSIDUOUSLY IN INVESTIGATIONS. THE NATIONAL GUARD AT OCOTAL WAS ALSO ACCUSED OF USING TORTURE IN THE CASE OF CONSERVATIVE ELECTORAL JUDGE LUCILIO MARTINEZ FIVE MONTHS AGO (MANAGUA 4182) AND WE SURMISE THAT EITHER A STRONG SADISTIC ELEMENT IS PRESENT IN THE GUARD THERE OR THAT NUEVA SEGOVIA HAS BECOME AN AREA OF PARTICULAR GON CONCERN, PUBLIC ORDER OR OTHERWISE.
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